

DISCOURSE AND THE LOGIC OF EDUCATION REFORM: CRISIS NARRATIVES IN  
KANSAS

by

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## **Abstract**

Discourse analysis (DA) explores the relationships between discursive practices and wider social and cultural structures, relations, and processes. In this paper I explore, through a qualitative DA of education reporting in the Topeka Capital Journal (January 2014- January 2016), state press releases, and gubernatorial state speeches, how notions of fiscal crisis, both material and narratively cultivated, function to underscore the logic of neoliberalism. While considering potential context specific properties of local reporting and the cultural, geographical, and historical context of the region, I connect my findings with the larger, scholarly body of work pertaining to these issues. Connecting media language and policy discourse across local and global dimensions adds to a growing theoretical and qualitative understanding of the facets of education restructuring and reform within the framework of the global movement and adds material resources in the form of analysis as tools for educational practitioners and grassroots organizations working to craft alternatives to the neoliberal doctrine

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## **Dedication**

To teachers everywhere who continue to struggle against reform efforts that diminish their professional capacity and calling to affirm young peoples' desire to interrogate, ponder, and create. I stand in solidarity with your fight.

## **Chapter 1 - Introduction**

“For any system of thought to become dominant, it requires the articulation of fundamental concepts that become so deeply embedded in commonsense understandings that they are taken for granted and beyond question. For this to occur, not any old concepts will do. A conceptual apparatus has to be constructed that appeals almost naturally to our intuitions and instincts, to our values and our desires, as well as to the possibilities that seem to inhere in the social world we inhabit.”

*David Harvey, Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction*

### **Problem and Rationale**

In a demonstration in the summer of 2015, as contract negotiations began to escalate between the Chicago Public Schools Board of Education (CPS BOE) and the Chicago Teacher’s Union (CTU), teachers unveiled their newest slogan, “CPS, Broke on Purpose” (See Appendix A for photo) (CTU communications, 2015; 2015; Perez, 2015; Prosen, 2015). Karen Lewis, President of the CTU, asserted,

The BOE has rejected even our most modest proposals which establish best practices in various areas of our profession that would cost nothing at all...How do you reject having librarians do their job as opposed to serving as subs most of the day? How do you reject proposals to strengthen special education instruction or strengthen the implementation of restorative justice programs to reduce conflict in our schools? This makes no sense—they are penny wise and pound foolish (CTU communications, 2015).

Instead of simply challenging the common logic of education reform, the dismantling of the public institutional apparatus, using critique of the material consequences of city/state policy as

is commonplace in the debate in an era of rapidly privatizing public spaces, Lewis proffered a counter narrative, one outside the purview of neoliberal education rationality, “The Board has created a fiscal crisis in order to justify its continued attack on our classrooms and communities. CPS is broke on purpose” and continued in her speech, to instruct how working within the state’s narrative, such logic and the commonsense response operate to further institute neoliberal actions within the CPS system (CTU communications, 2015).

The discursive and material actions of neoliberalism as realized in public institutions, the purposeful bankrupting of K-12 schools, universities, hospitals, and so on, as means of expanding the private isn’t geographically specific. It is a national and global phenomenon, (Appadurai, 1990, 2000; Chomsky & McChesney, 2001; Leitner, Peck, & Sheppard, 2006; Sassen, 2007), that while diffuse and uneven in the way it manifests, has found home in city, state, and international political bureaucracies alike (Rizvi & Lingard, 2000, 2009). “Creative destruction,” a phrase coined by geographer and social theorist, David Harvey (2007), speaks to both the theory behind this political and economic logic and its current presence in the public sphere,

Neoliberalism is a theory of political economic practices proposing that human wellbeing can best be advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices... Furthermore, if markets do not exist (in areas such as education, health care, social security, or environmental pollution), then they must be created, by state action if necessary (p. 23).

In the current era of neoliberal reform and state motivation to transfer shared public assets into

private, market-driven hands (Harvey, 2007), public institutions have become both discursive and materially problematized (Slater, 2015). As such, those concerned with the preservation and viability of education as a public institution must directly take up the discursive construction of neoliberal logic, much like Lewis, the CTU, and the CPS slogan does when public official claim empty pockets, and seek to uncover the ways in which language functions to craft a social ontology that is amenable to this new way of being.

### **Kansas Education in “New Times”: The Neoliberal Logic of Crisis**

If one were to drive a bit east of Lawrence, KS, you will encounter another sign worth noting in this conversation about education and finance in “new times” (Strauss, 2015). It reads, “Independence, Missouri School District. Hiring Teachers for 2015. Enrollment is on the Rise. Apply Now” (See Appendix B for photo) (Zeff, 2015a; Szabo, 2015). It is rather discordant to see teacher recruitment placards from a neighbor state advertising miles from the state line, but teacher flight in Kansas opens a door of opportunity for many peripheral communities. The sign and the way it symbolically points to the socio-political complexity of education in the present era has captured the curiosity of the local and national media. Teachers are leaving the state (Goossen, 2014; Richmond, 2015; Zeff, 2015b). Empirical data points to numeric position losses at home and gains in surrounding states where this was historically not the case (Zeff, 2015b). The impetus for the exodus has not been explicitly defined outside of personal and editorial journalistic causal connections. Yet media polemicists and vocal professionals have insinuated that the state’s teacher shortage comes from a series of politically motivated policies (Goossen, 2015; Klein, 2015; Llopis-Jensen, 2015c, Richinick, 2015) that have served to undermine the profession for sometime, namely gubernatorial changes to state’s education funding formula, nationally low teacher salaries, the elimination of collective bargaining rights, and the reduction



of teacher qualification measures that open the door for schools to hire unlicensed teachers (Goossen, 2015; Klein, 2015; Llopis-Jensen, 2015c, Richinick, 2015).

### **Purpose of the Study**

With dual points of concerns, a state fiscal deficit and a teacher shortage, public education in Kansas *is* in peril. For the purpose of this study, however, I would like to return to the question posed by the CTU slogan regarding the origins of this crisis and challenge how this has come to be, both materially and discursively, in the state? Nearly 40 years ago, Bowles and Gintis (2011) critically addressed the structural economic conditions and competing philosophical paradigms at work in education in the United States of America. Their conclusions, vast economic inequality, socially reproduced over generations that stagnates agency- effects attributable to the political economy of the US, is still a pervasive truth for school-aged youth today (Berliner, 2015; Piketty & Goldhammer, 2014). However, with the ontological naturalization of neoliberal policies (Harvey, 1990), the political economic game has changed. Public school, once assumed to be a bedrock public/community institution, now face a challenge to their very existence (Harvey, 2005, 2007). The body of scholarly work dealing with the marketization of public institutions is also vast (Baltodano, 2012; Davies, Quirke & Aurini, 2006; Lipman, 2011, 2013; Ravitch, 2013). Within these works and those outside the discipline, academics explicitly understand that policies related to neoliberalism are evolving and situated (Appadurai, 1990, 2000; Ball, 1998, 2013, 2015). While micro-case analysis doesn't allow for the structural, scalar conclusions that allow for the political, economic, social and spatial nuance that is endemic to neoliberal policy manifestations, the ability inquire into the ways in which social ontology accounts for "objective processes of assembly: a wide-range of social entities, from persons to nation-states... that are constructed through specific historical processes, processes in which language plays an important

role” (Delanda, 2006). Therefore, as a scholar with a vested concern in a viable, equitable education apparatus, I think it is of great consequence that we continue to ask and investigate questions regarding the discursive state and media problematization of education specifically as it affects less researched populations and spaces.

### **Research Questions**

Q1: How does the state and media discursively problematize KS public education?

Q2: How does "crisis" function within the media and state gubernatorial discourse of KS public education?

### **Subjectivity Statement**

My motivations as a researcher comes from the traditions of public sociology (Burawoy, n.d.) and critical Freirian (1997) pedagogy that sets the transformation of society as the primary motivation for inquiry. My background as an urban public educator and activist in Chicago during the emerging era of neoliberal education reform situated me within a world where the I was able to witness, first hand, the deskilling/de-professionalization of teachers (Apple, 1986) and the consolidation of institutional school power into a central, privately-minded bureaucracy (Apple, 2006 & Lipman, 2011). The tension between what was happening in the district at large had a direct impact on my agency as an educator. Slowly, my ability to bring to life my classroom belief- that access to high quality and culturally and linguistically diverse education practices can indeed have an emancipatory role in the life of a student, began to move further and further from my power.

Thankfully, the movement to challenge these political and structural changes to educational institutions is growing (Lipman, 2011, 2013). Additionally, within these movements are strong

coalitions of K-12 educators, parents, students, and public individuals in academic, journalistic, or likewise socially minded roles. However, from what I have gathered personally living and working in this context in both an urban and rural environment, these networks are not well distributed across states/communities. While resources illuminating these powerful shifts and their devastating ramifications may be widely available in cities, those in less densely populated areas of the country are left to fight these battles unarmed. No where is this truer than in Kansas, where the logic of neoliberalism is strong (Richinick, 2015).

As researcher, educator, citizen, it is my belief that with awareness of what is and how it has come to be, we may take part in the act of shaping what is to become. This historically, geographically, and socially situated understanding is a much needed epistemological resources in Kansas. My vision of strong public schools is not something I checked at the state lines when I came with my family to our new home. While my milieu is different from Chicago, I see linkages beyond these scant geographical boundaries, and likewise have a vested, personal interest to see educators empowered. While my role and point of access to build towards social change is no longer in the schools as a classroom practitioner, I feel that I can help to continue my work of strengthening public education as an institution and as a practice through the pursuit of inquiry at the university by taking up politically relevant studies and have material meaning to those working on the ground in our state's schools.

I have said on several occasions since arriving here in KS, that in any other context, I would not be in academia. I would be a working with labor or an urban educator; never behind a desk, reading, thinking, and asking questions, but working on the ground, with others, in struggle, for change. But Kansas is my milieu, and for whatever reason, it is a foreign environment to me for the realization of all these more intimate versions of advocacy I mention

as a course of life. However, I cannot remove the lens through which I see the world anymore than I can casually remove the physical parts of my corporeal being. Harvey (2001) argues,

The bourgeois social science attempts to construct a view of the world from outside, to discover some fixed points on the basis of which an 'objective' understanding of the world may be fashioned. They typically seek to leave the world by way of an act of abstraction in order to understand it. The Marxist, by way of contrast, always seeks to construct an understanding of society from within rather than imagining some point without. The Marxist finds a whole bunch of levers for social change within the contradictory process of social life and seeks to construct an understanding of the world by pushing hard upon the levers. To construct knowledge requires an active involvement in the process of social change. We discover ourselves by striving to change the world, and in the course of the struggle we change both the world and ourselves. Nothing is certain in this struggle...But the only sure path to that knowledge which has the capacity to change the world is to engage in struggle. (p. 89)

I am not a bourgeois social scientist. My views regarding knowledge emerge from the material conditions of the world we share. As such, my work is informed by the myriad levels of contradiction I see as I engage with the world around me; most fundamentally within the changes to the structure of the American institution of public education. While I believe that knowledge is emergent and nuanced in that it is full of distinction, I must add a caveat to this paradigmatic system. I contend that we should seek to embrace limited notions of universalism (Chibber, 2015) within the project of building inclusive, emancipatory scholarship, and as a function of that, equitable systems for living in the world.

## **Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions**

The limitations of this study include that it is bound by a strictly qualitative set of research questions that are further restricted by a theoretical and methodological framework that is not concerned with explaining a particular situation or phenomenon, but rather specifically addressing how language functions within the data sources (Holloway-Libell, 2015). In addition to the theoretical and methodological limitations, this project includes subjectivity in researcher facilitated coding. The study is also restrained by the brevity of timeline. While these limitations restrict the generalizability and replicability of the project, the importance of adding to the research conversation regarding the subject of education policy, critical media literacy, and neoliberal reform of public institutions remain.

Within the scope of this project there are several delimitations that must also be noted. Based on the time frame for of this project, there are several researcher dependent choices that delimit the projects findings. Source selection was limited to Kansas media publications with relative proximity to the State government, in addition to official State government sources. Instead of culling all education reporting from the TCJ during the time period and addressing language use as a whole, I specifically bracket search language to education funding, the state teacher shortage, and crisis as defined in in my methodology to address a smaller set of research questions. The time frame from which I culled the data additionally delimits the scope of the project, in that the sources only draw language used by a single governor from a single political party.

As an extension of the methodological and theoretical framework used as the basis for this project, there are several inherent assumptions that are made that must be addressed. Because the

research study privileges the ontologically and epistemologically subjective and socially constructed, the researcher assumes that what is perceived by any individual as the ‘naturalized’ state of education and policy within our present moment, has been linguistically and materially construed, over time, to arrive at its current manifestation. Within the purview of this current iteration, there is a set of contemporary practices, identified as neoliberal logic, that informs the current social, material, spatial, and linguistic understanding of what ‘education’ is and how we come to know it.

## **Literature and Terms**

### **Definitions of Terms**

The business of discussing education, as an institution, as a set of practices within a specific time period, or at a macro-policy level, is a noble, yet highly contested project. Education research is an arena that is inherently messy, and rife with deeply held political and personal beliefs and priorities. As such, to begin any inquiry and discussion of education reporting in a politically charged framework as is the current landscape of education policy and practices in Kansas, it is organizationally prudent to establish a set of working definitions for terms utilized in this project, grounded in disciplinary scholarship, that will allow me to remain both consistent and true to the research questions that drive this research study. While the reader may be familiar with lay uses of the following terms, they are also inherently contested as words/sentiments for describing and understanding education as an institution in our social world. What follows are the defining ways I have come to know these terms, and in turn, how I will employ them within the theoretical and methodological bounds of this project.

### **Discourse**

Discourse, at its most basic level, is simply the use of language (Schneider, 2004: 16) including written and spoken language as text. And indeed, written and spoken words are the foundation of the sources I utilize for this project. However, I also make use of a very specific definition and interpretation of discourse; post-structural discourse as theory and discourse analysis as method, that conceive and focuses on an even more exacting definition of discourse/language, what it is and how/why we would look to it to tell us about our social world (Gee, 1999, 2014). Discourse in this study refers to a “set of interrelated set of texts, and the practices of their production, dissemination, and reception, that bring an object into being” (Parker, 1992 as sighted in Phillips & Hardy). The nature of our social world and the reality that we experience, is produced and reproduced through discourse. In order to better understand the social world and what is “true” for any fleeting moment in time, we must look to language, text, and social practice for answers to our questions (Gee, 1999, 2014; Phillips & Hardy, 2002).

### **Neoliberalism**

Neoliberalism is a political-economic rationality with a set of corresponding policies, practices, and ways of thinking/being that has come into favor over the last thirty years (Brown, 2015; Harvey, 2005; Lazzarato, 2009; Ong, 2007). Associated with the “economization” of everyday life, Brown, who’s definition I utilize for this project, describes neoliberal rationality as totalizing,

As human beings become market actors and nothing but, every field of activity is seen as a market, and every entity (whether public or private, whether person, business, or state) is governed as a firm. Importantly, this is not simply a matter of extending commodification and monetization everywhere—that’s the old Marxist depiction of capital’s transformation of everyday life. Neoliberalism construes even non-wealth generating spheres—such as

learning, dating, or exercising—in market terms, submits them to market metrics, and governs them with market techniques and practices. Above all, it casts people as human capital who must constantly tend to their own present and future value. Moreover, because neoliberalism came of age with (and abetted) financialization, the form of marketization at stake does not always concern products or commodities, let alone their exchange. Today, market actors—from individuals to firms, universities to states, restaurants to magazines—are more often concerned with their speculatively determined value, their ratings and rankings that shape future value, than with immediate profit. All are tasked with enhancing present and future value through self-investments that in turn attract investors. Financialized market conduct entails increasing or maintaining one’s ratings, whether through blog hits, retweets, Yelp stars, college rankings, or Moody’s bond ratings. (Shenk, 2015)

### **Crisis**

Scholars (Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Harvey, 2005; Lipman, 2012; Slater, 2014) have defined crisis as an outgrowth of political-economic conditions within capitalism, as manufactured crisis, creative destruction, capital accumulation, accumulation by dispossession, and as recovery. In addition to the preceding definition(s), crisis has also been utilized as a thematic for understanding media reporting within the particular social and cultural moment of neoliberalism (Anderson, 2007; Chakravartty & Schiller, 2010; Edelman, 1988) as seen in the rise of “infotainment” where moral panic is proffered as a means of garnering viewership via political spectacle. Both understandings of crisis are essential to any discussion of the historic, social, political, and discursive nature of financial education reporting in the contemporary era.



## **Chapter 2 - Methodology**

### **Research Design**

My research agenda with this present point of inquiry is to synthesize and expand on the recent work of scholars (Anderson, Aronson, Ellison, & Fairchild-Keyes, n.d.; Anderson, 2007; Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001, 2002; Bracey, 1994; Cohen, 2010; Ellison, 2012; Ford, Porfilio, & Goldstein, 2015; Gabriel, & Lester, 2013; Goldstein, 2011; Goldstein, Macrine & Chesky, 2011; Taylor, 2004; Wallace; 1995; Wubbena, 2016) examining how media discourse around policy issues in education problematizes the public institution and works to underscore and promote neoliberal rationality within the society at large (Davies & Bansel, 2007; DeVitis & Teitelbaum; 2014). “Discourse analysis (DA) aims to explore the relationships between discursive practices and wider social and cultural structures, relations, and processes” (Taylor, 2004, p. 435). By focusing on discourse of “education budgetary crisis” and “state teacher shortage” in Kansas through a qualitative DA of education reporting in the Topeka Capital Journal (September, 2014 -September, 2015), I will inquire into the structural relationship between communicative tools, and the ways in which these texts shape public opinion and naturalize neoliberal policies (Bacchi, 2000, Gee, 1999, 2014; Hacking, 1993). While considering potential context specific properties of local reporting and the socio-cultural, geographical, and historical context of the region, I seek to connect my findings with the scholarly body of work pertaining to these issues. Connecting media language and policy discourse across local and global dimensions adds to a growing theoretical and qualitative understanding of the facets of education restructuring and reform within the framework of the global movement and adds material resources in the form of analysis as tools for educational practitioners and grassroots organizations working to craft alternatives to the neoliberal doctrine (Appadurai, 1990, 2000).

## **Source Selection**

Data for this study will consist of full, primary source, archived publications from the Topeka Capital Journal (TCJ), the state of Kansas's most closely connected periodical to financial and public institution reporting, gubernatorial State of the State (STOTS) speeches, official press releases from the Office of the Governor of the State of Kansas, and the Road Map 2.0 document produced by the Governor's office as a plan for public institutions in the state. Texts will be accessed through the LexisNexis database and thorough the Governor's official website. Data for this study will span TCJ reporting from January 1, 2014 to January 1, 2016, and SOTS and press releases from the same years.

## **Data Collection Procedures**

Texts will be selected based on their relevance to the study via search terms pertaining to state education financing and the state teacher shortage (education and budget or teacher shortage). Once texts are located within the aforementioned timeframe, they will be imported into Scrivener, a word-processing program designed to facilitate working between multiple data sources, preexisting literature, and researcher generated thoughts/questions, for conversational contextual discourse analysis using the social context, discourse analysis tools developed by Gee (2014).

## **Analytic Procedures**

For this study, my inquiry will consist of deep qualitative analysis of the texts via researcher facilitated, conversational coding (Gee, 2014) that critically address the contextual elements of the sources as they connect to the logic of neoliberalism within the framework of crisis and education reform in Kansas. I chose not to use computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) within this methodological approach. While CAQDAS might

allow me as a researcher the ability to quantify the numeric appearance of specific terms, phrases, relevant grammatical features, the guiding research questions for this study necessitate that I move beyond detailed descriptive statistics to examine, in detail, the texts as a whole for the "full ideological significance" of expressions. (MacMillian, 2008). As such, I employ an analysis journal to catalog all of the thoughts, questions, and comments that arise as I read through the source materials. In addition to the conversational coding, I draw heavily from my theoretical framework and the prior literature to make connections between the data language and how language functions to problematize education within the state.

### **Establishing Trustworthiness**

The validity of this study is underscored by its relationship to a larger body of scholarly work that critically addresses neoliberal discourse in media depictions of education as a socio-political institution (Anderson, Aronson, Ellison, & Fairchild-Keyes, n.d.; Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2002, 2001; Cohen, 2010; Ellison, 2012; Gabriel, & Lester, 2013; Taylor, 2004). In addition to being grounded in collective conversation regarding the philosophical, social, political, and economic consequences to public institutions as a result of advancing neoliberal policies, the theoretical and methodological basis for the study draws from scholarship in qualitative research that values the rich perspective deep, critical analysis of language provides to questions within the applied social sciences (Ball, 1993, 2013, 2015; Dumas & Anderson, 2014; Guba, 1981; Maxwell, 1992).

## Chapter 3 - Findings

### Crisis in the State Sources

The State's discursive construction of crisis embodies classic neoliberal tropes of free-market logic (Baltodano, 2012; Harvey, 2005; Lazzarato, 2009; Lipman, 2011), namely the inefficiency of public/state funded institutions. I found that education was problematized when the language used in Governor Sam Brownback's State of the State Speeches (2014-2016), notions of fiscal crisis were constructed as the fundamental inability of welfare state policies to "advance the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade" (Harvey, 2007). Over the course of Governor Brownback's tenure in state office, his official speeches outline a specific political economic logic closely associated with neoliberalism and his suggested policy path forward for institutions, such as education, within the state of Kansas.

We see in his early gubernatorial speeches, Governor Brownback articulates that the greatest "crisis" Kansans faces is the state's dire financial situation, "**Kansas state government was flat broke.** We had begun the fiscal year with \$876.05 in the bank. The **state couldn't even pay its own bills.** **Everyone** from school districts to service vendors **was suffering**" [emphasis added]. (Brownback, 2014). Later, he goes on to offer up a solution to this crisis- namely that big government is failing to deliver prosperity in its recklessness with financial spending, and that a lessening the tax burden in the state frees up the necessary fiscal assets to restore budgetary order,

The **government was not serving the people.** Unfortunately, it was the other way around. We had two **big challenges** --get people working again and **restore fiscal discipline.** We took action, breaking from the **failed policies in the past.** We developed an action plan.

We streamlined regulations, reformed workers' compensation and went from the second highest tax burden in our region to the second lowest. [emphasis added] (Brownback, 2014)

Instead of the government making decisions, problematically Governor Brownback argues, he calls for a return to a rule by the people, “We need to stop counting on government to create prosperity and put our faith in the people of Kansas” (Brownback, 2014). We see this repeated throughout the speech, when again the governor asserts, "One of the ironies, though, of our age is that **government has become omnipresent, yet the people have never felt more distant from it.** Too many **decisions are made by unaccountable, opaque institutions**" [emphasis added] (Brownback, 2014). I argue, the state is constructing anomie as *the* individual condition of big government. Citizens are unable to see, to know, to participate. As such, the Governor puts forth his agenda as a form of paternalistic care. The Governor’s office will aid the institution of education by breaking down hidden barriers of appropriations and allow the schools to be funded according to a new formula, that of the people’s elected official.

On the **number one item in the state budget—education**—the Constitution empowers **the Legislature—the people’s representatives—to fund our schools.** This is the people’s business, done by the people’s house through the wonderfully untidy—but open for all to see—business of appropriations. Let us resolve that our schools remain open and are not closed by the courts or anyone else. **Prosperity, responsibility. Education, opportunity. Safety, natural bounty. Freedom, sovereignty. Reconciliation.** [emphasis added] (Brownback, 2014)

It is in the pairing of the final words that Governor Brownback makes the ideological linkages between his policy agenda and the neoliberal imagination. The first pairing,

prosperity/responsibility, suggests that it is through fiscal discipline it is possible to create wealth in the state. In the second paring, education/opportunity, the governor taps into the collective sentiment that it is through education that one may realize their potential, something Kansans have long supported with high levels of pre-recession funding (Leachman & Mai, 2014) and one that will be key to the fiscal policy agenda in the state. The fourth and final paring, freedom/sovereignty, offers up that citizens who are not burdened by the fiscal weight of the welfare state can realize their full capacity for freedom. However, it is in the final word, reconciliation, that Brownback proffers that path forward. To achieve the fruits of of prosperity, opportunity, natural bounty, freedom, and sovereignty, there must be change. The ways of the past will not grant the way forward. To transcend the current crisis, the citizens of the state must be willing to restore balance; attenuated through fiscal disciple.

Schools and education remain a constant throughout the following yearly speeches. While never delving into the details of the antagonisms happening in the state surrounding the judicial lawsuit filed with the State Supreme Court regarding the legality of the changes made by the Brownback Governor's Office (Llopis-Jepsen, 2015a) or the growing resentment to the the fiscal cuts to state institutions that were a result of Governor Brownback tax plan (Shoreman, 2015), Brownback maintains his agenda, that to make monetary gains in the state and eliminate the crisis of inefficiency, the tax and education funding formulas must be recreated.

Education is not done by money or buildings. It is done by teachers. Teaching isn't a job or a vocation. It's a calling... Teachers need money to care for their needs. That's why **Kansans invest in education: so good teachers are able to do their calling** and teach. Yet today, **of the more than \$4 billion the state puts into education funding, not nearly enough goes toward instruction. That's highly inefficient if not immoral,**

**denying Kansans from putting their education dollars where they want it...** behind good teachers. I call on the legislature to **design a new education funding system** that puts more of our money into instruction. That provides bonuses for exceptional teachers and recognizes their true value **to our future and the souls of our students.** (Brownback, 2016)

Brownback invokes the inherent unethical and dishonest nature of a welfare state education funding formula in his 2016 speech. Dollars serve a bloated government agenda instead of what Kansans care most about, namely students and effective teachers. He posits that the very moral substance of Kansas youth hangs in a balance if the crisis of the antiquated funding formula is allowed to persist. Therefore, he argues, we must “innovate and modernize” from these “wasteful” relics of the past (Brownback, 2016). The way forward is to “eliminate, consolidate, and privatize” (Brownback, 2015).

### **Crisis in the Media Sources**

While media sources discursively construct educational crisis critically in relation to the State's position, namely as problems that have arisen with fiscal challenges/changes to the State's educational funding formula, the media narrative utilizes crisis rhetoric in the production, of what I argue to be understood as "political spectacle" (Altheide, 2002; Anderson, 2007; Edelman, 1988; McChesney, 2004, 2008). While the media construction of crisis differs rhetorically from the State's conception of education at this particular moment in Kansas, the language used does not operate outside the purview of neoliberal rationality nor a problematized educational apparatus. When Topeka Capital journalists take up issues of the fiscal changes to the State's education funding policy, the state teacher shortage, the elimination of teacher's collective bargaining rights, and the freeing up teacher licensure laws function, and even the

growing sentiment in the state against gubernatorial actions, there is consistently “heightened moral panic” (Altheide, 2002; Anderson, 2007; Edelman, 1988; McChesney, 2004, 2008) that functions within, and actually works to underscore notions of an unviable public educational institutions within Kansas. Crisis and fear become a “dominant public perspective” that “expand[s] beyond a specific referent to become a more general orientation” (Altheide, 2002), irrespective of source or the choice of what, how to employ comments from concerned administrators, educators, parents, and state residents.

This can be seen in the discourse employed by Capital Journal reporting with the material effects of fiscal changes to the school funding formula, "**It's a mess. We're in perpetual budget crisis. It's not a rosy picture long term... all of the easy decisions have been made... We're going to have to make some tough decisions moving forward**" [emphasis added] (Wilke, 2015). And again, with the staffing and financial challenges of a shortage of teachers in the state, Hiring quality teachers is one of the most important tasks for any school. But **reports of districts unable to find the staff they need are common**, and in Kansas, those affected often are remote or rural districts. At Garden City Unified School District 457, **the shortage of in-state job candidates costs taxpayers tens of thousands of dollars a year.** [emphasis added] (Llopis-Jepsen, 2015c)

Crisis language is also utilized to illustrate the myriad of instructional, extra-curricular, institutional, and staffing losses that have also piled up across the state.

Many eliminated jobs, cut classroom budgets for teachers to buy supplies and discontinued all or almost all of their field trips, unless paid for by parent teacher organizations. Some asked parents to supply office paper and cleaning supplies for the school and their offices. Topeka shed scores of veteran teachers, offering the early



retirement. Wichita closed an alternative school and dropped the number of police officers in its schools. Santa Fe restructured its buildings, dropping its community school model in favor of bussing more children farther from home. Baldwin City closed outlying rural schools. (Llopis-Jepsen, 2015a)

In each instance, the public consumes discourse as reporting that speaks to a withering educational institution. Nowhere, outside of scant letters to the editor, or editorials are schools in the state being seen as not “at risk.” As such, further austerity, belt tightening on the part of district/building administrators, parents and students going without, less programming, less resources becomes the only viable solution to such a catastrophe. The language of crisis becomes *the* all encompassing, totalizing, and orienting mode of understanding.

If you need additional chapters, follow these steps:

1. Insert a Page Break.
2. Type the headline that you want in regular text.
3. Select the text and apply a “Heading 1” style.

## Chapter 4 - Discussion of Findings

Slater's (2015) framework of recovery is apt lens through which to view the complex State and media narrative constructions of crisis in Kansas education reporting because instead of an exclusive focus on "destruction" and response, as taken up in much of the scholarly work concerning the erosion of education as a public institution (Apple, 2006; Lipman, 2011, 2013; Ravitch, 2013), Slater (2015) draws from the work of post-structural theory and Foucaultian discourse analysis and governmentality (Ball, 1993, 2013, 2015; Foucault, 1980; Joseph, 2013, Lemke, 2002, McKee, 2009; Peters, 2001; Springer, 2012) in tandem with critical Marxist scholarship (De Lissovoy & McLaren, 2003; Giroux, 2008; Hardt & Negri, 2009; Harvey, 2001, 2005, 2007) to "incorporate the ideological and discursive with the material and subject form" (Slater, 2015) into our tool kit for understanding how crisis functions within an era of neoliberal logic and change, irrespective of geographic location or political entity.

Slater (2015) notes, "Recovery is a simultaneously discursive and material force that is fundamentally implicated in the educational production of subjectivity and the enclosures of visions of social futures outside or beyond neoliberalism." Within the "neoliberal lifeworld," (Slater, 2015) the cycle of crisis-recovery/(accumulation)-crisis is a seamless process of dispossession that makes use of both the naturally and cultivated material effects of neoliberalism while incorporating the ways in which the response to the discursive construction within this totalizing enterprise allows the processes to become naturalized, subsuming, and continued.

We see in the findings that both narratives, the Brownback State's construction of an impoverished and inefficient educational apparatus and the media's critical, yet crisis laden rhetoric function to subsume any ability for a resident citizenry to imagine or proffer an

alternative outside of a fundamentally problematized or reformed educational institution. The response, therefore becomes, as is so saliently illustrated in Slater's (2015) historical policy analysis of *A Nation at Risk* to *Race to the Top* and case study of New Orleans post-hurricane Katrina, recovery, a subjective and ideological continuation/facilitation of neoliberal social conditions and capital and institutional accumulation where education and educational subjects become responsible for restoring order in a disrupted society (Slater, 2015).

## **Chapter 5 - Implications and Recommendations for Further Research**

### **New Social Imaginaries: Possibilities for Education in an Era of Neoliberal Logic**

'Crises' both at large and more specifically, those dealing with the reforms to education as a social institution, necessitate a larger understanding of the historical, political, spatial, and discursive modes of neoliberal rationality. Because the "machinations of neoliberal reforms are shifting/contingent" (Slater, 2015), those working to resist the way we have "come to know" education in this new era must seek to uncover the manner in which material/discursive practices shape this cycle of "crisis-accumulation/recovery-crisis" (Slater, 2015) and posit a counter narrative that works outside this logic.

Those who struggle to resist neoliberal logic at work in problematizing public institutions, be they teachers, parents and students, social activists, concerned academics, or enlightened journalists, must continue to critique and question the two-pronged material and discursive nature of crisis as we uncover the ways in which have become ontologically normalized to this mode of thought and action. This includes a continued examination of discourse scholarship in the academe that addresses the ways in which language is constitutive of social being and how, by the very nature of language used to problematize education in this era, we have come to restrict what we can imagine as "possibilities" for the institution. It must also consist of on the ground, grassroots movements, by those directly affected by austerity and restructuring; the material manifestations of education reform policies, who also must continue to challenge the very nature of the ways schools are being reconstituted. It is in both these forms of agency,

critical theoretical understandings together with practice, we can posit a **new** social imaginary, *lines of flight* (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004), that address questions outside of the current, compressed vision, of what education is, who it serves, and how teachers, students, parents and communities can cultivate this alternative social space in a democratic, egalitarian fashion?

On April 1, 2016 Chicago teachers, students, and families once again joined ranks in the streets, along with community leaders, city activists with the Black Lives Matter and Fight for \$15 movements, and members of the city's public higher education constituency to contest the Mayoral and Governor lead austerity measures that continue to wreak havoc on public institutions and community livelihoods in Chicago (Catalyst Chicago, 2016). Instead of a narrowly focusing on school specific destruction and degradation, CTU welcomed a coalition network of all those disaffected by financial cuts to join in the day of action to challenge the political-economic logic behind city/state policy reform that has affected vast swaths of the cities working class citizenry. A mass movement gathered, cultivated by links between their collective struggles, and voiced their anger and frustration with what has become of their city. In an open letter to the Chicago Tribune, Alison Eichhorn (2016), a teacher at Lindblom Math and Science Academy in Chicago made these connections and offered up what could come from a collective, mass movement for change,

April 1 is the culmination of frustration, anger, fear, anxiety and injustices felt by people across this city. For years, the hardworking people of this city have been starved of the resources that allow them to live their lives with a sense of pride and dignity. The robber barons of the present day have instead made them feel that their pleas for adequate schools, social services and a living wage are misguided and flat-out wrong.

The action on April 1 is one component of a broader struggle for the future of this city and the Chicagoans who are the true heroes in this fight — the workers who make this city run every single day... Chicagoans — and Illinoisans — deserve the chance to live in a place where they feel respected, have the social services that they need, and have the opportunity to go to a great public grade school, college, trade school or university to pursue careers of their choosing. For these reasons, I am walking on April 1. I am a public educator who works in a system that has un-elected leaders who spend their time and money not doing what is best for students. I urge my colleagues and every single working-class member of this city to join me on April 1.

Action, such as the April 1<sup>st</sup> general strike in Chicago is not *the* answer to the material and discursive challenges to education in an era of neoliberal logic in Kansas. Cities and communities will have localized, situated visions of possibilities of what can be done with the institutions. However, it is this imagination that must be tapped to unleash the torrent of emancipatory social potential to be captured as a positive force for change and a counter narrative to the logic of neoliberalism.

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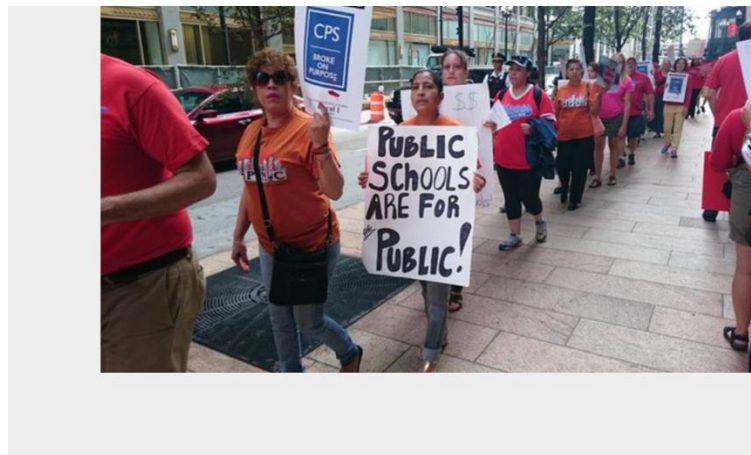
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## Appendix A - Chicago Teacher's Union "Broke on Purpose" Photos

Images from demonstrations in 2015 during contract negotiations between the Chicago Public Schools Board of Education and the Chicago Teacher's Union, teachers unveiled their newest slogan, "CPS, Broke on Purpose" (CTU communications, 2015; Perez, 2015; Prosen, 2015).



(King, 2015)



Gregory Michie on Twitter: "Broke on purpose, CPS!" <http://t.co...>  
[twitter.com](https://twitter.com)

Images may be subject to copyright.

(Michie, 2015)

## Kansas Teacher Recruitment Billboard Photo

The highway placard east bound on the I-70 Turnpike outside of Lawrence, advertises positions to Kansas teachers interested in relocating due to lack of satisfaction with low pay, loss of collective bargaining rights, and recent policies to hire unlicensed teachers (Strauss, 2015; Zeff, 2015b).



(Szabo, 2105)